

4/27/10 (6)

Christine Joyce

From: Terra Friedrichs [terraf@compuserve.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 20, 2010 10:11 PM
To: Board of Selectmen
Subject: Potential Sign Enforcement Press Release



Sign Enforcement
Town Stateme...

Please consider the attached and/or think of ideas on how we, as a Town can help curb the rumors about what the Town did or didn't do, is or isn't doing, relative to sign enforcement. I'm not married to this draft, or the approach of having a press release, but I do think we should prepare "some kind of message" to the business community "from the Town". As Roland stated in his memo, people are talking, and it would help to figure out what to do about it... I only got a quick email from Steve today on this, but he seems to think that any statement from "the Town" should come from the Board. So I'm forwarding this to you for consideration.

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Terra

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The Town values its relationship with the business community. The Town's Master Plan and several other planning documents have expressed the importance of increasing the percentage of our tax base contributed by commercial tax revenues. These documents reflect the fact that Acton's citizens have made it clear that the business community is an essential part of the fabric of the community.

To help assist the Town in its efforts to support businesses, the Town has built a strong advocate of business in its Economic Development Committee (the EDC). A principal goal in the EDC's mission is to support existing businesses. In fact, there are two "member seats" on the EDC expressly reserved for the Chamber of Commerce, which is also a strong ally to businesses in our region.

But as appreciative as the Town is towards its business community, the citizens have also expressed how important it is that the Town be attractive. Not surprisingly, many citizens are wary of a proliferation of signs and of signs which are not well designed. So, over the course of years, Town Meeting voted into law our current sign bylaws by two thirds majority vote. This makes it clear that an orderly sign process is a high priority for our citizens. Town Meeting also voted to budget for a Zoning Enforcement Officer to help ensure that compliance with all our zoning bylaws, including signage, is carried out promptly and professionally.

Recently, it came to our attention that sign enforcement action has become a concern for many local businesses. After hearing from a number of businesses concerned about signage enforcement, the EDC came to the Board of Selectmen and explained that many businesses had not been aware of the laws, or of the potential for fines. The EDC asked that the BoS institute a moratorium to give the business community time to learn about the bylaws and to help develop a "new" enforcement process that the business community could support wholeheartedly.

Unfortunately, the situation seems to be more complicated, and an outright moratorium on signage enforcement, however brief, is not allowed under the bylaw. In fact, the Town is legally obligated to enforce, to the best of its ability, the current bylaws for signage.

- [Nina, do you think we need stronger language here, or to call out specific language in the bylaw to make it very clear that the Town can't just overlook violations?]

As always, the Town is interested in opportunities to improve its bylaws and the enforcement processes which support those laws. Consequently, the business community is welcome to help propose changes to the sign bylaws. In fact we are currently working on opportunities for members of the business community to participate in the process by which we review the existing signage bylaw and the enforcement process now in place. We also are looking to structure a review panel for handling the processing of signage violations which have already been recorded.

The EDC, because of its focus on supporting business, is an excellent mechanism for businesses to participate in developing proposed process/bylaw change. We encourage you to work with them to implement change which you think should be made.

So if you have ideas on how the process/bylaws could be improved in the future, please contact the EDC or you may attend the EDC's regular meetings which occur on the first and third Thursday of each month. The committee's meeting schedule is posted on the town website (acton-ma.gov).

Steve Ledoux is Acton's Town Manager. He and his staff are carrying out enforcement on the current bylaws. At a recent BoS meeting, it was decided that if any business owner had a grievance, as to how the enforcement process works, they should contact his office directly at 978-264 9612, manager@acton-ma.gov

Processes can always be improved upon. And the Board of Selectman is always appreciative of feedback regarding the Town's enforcement processes. The Board takes all input into consideration for future

planning. We, as a Board, can not help improve the process or the bylaws without feedback from the people that are impacted.

We hope you understand that we must balance our obligations under law with our desire to serve many different goals of our Master Plan. And we hope that you consider helping us improve our processes and bylaws.